

William Dorsheimer House
438 Delaware Avenue
Buffalo
Erie County
New York

HABS No. NY-5608

HABS
NY,
15-BUF,
2-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS No. NY-5608

WILLIAM DORSHEIMER HOUSE

HABS
NY,
15-BUF,
2-

Location: 438 Delaware Avenue, Buffalo, Erie County, New York

Present Owner: George R. Bennett Company, 434-438 Delaware Avenue

Present Occupant: George R. Bennett Company and rental units

Present Use: Offices

Statement of Significance: The William Dorsheimer House of 1868--although not constructed in H. H. Richardson's identifiable Romanesque Revival Style--presents a severe, dignified facade which perhaps illustrates the influence of his training less than two years earlier at the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1868-69.
2. Architect: Henry Hobson Richardson and Charles Gambrill, firm, 6 Hanover Street, New York City.
3. Original and subsequent owners: William Dorsheimer, the original owner, had title to the property before October, 1868, the date of the commission.
4. Builder or contractor: Not known.
5. Original plans: None known. A plan and elevation do exist for a later projected house for Dorsheimer, presumably one to have been built, c. 1875, in Albany.
6. Alterations and additions: Only the exterior shell remains of the original house. An obvious addition fills in the rear corner of the L-shaped plan.

B. Historical Events and Persons Connected with the Structure:

William Dorsheimer was District Attorney, District of Northern New York, 1867 to 1871. He was the Lieutenant-Governor of New York from January 1, 1875, to December 31, 1879. Dorsheimer was also Mayor of Buffalo, and very active in Buffalo's Fine Arts Academy and Board of Park

Commissioners. This latter group was established in 1869. On August 25, 1868, a group of Buffalo residents began a movement for the creation of a proper system of public parks, before the further growth of the city made it more difficult and costly to secure desirable lands. Dorsheimer was on the committee--which included Joseph Warren, Pascal Paoli Pratt, Sherman S. Jewett, and Richard Flach--whose members, at their own expense, hired Frederick Law Olmsted to survey the city and to submit a report. Since Olmsted was intimately acquainted with Richardson, it is possible that the many commissions which followed due to Dorsheimer's influence were brought to Richardson through Olmsted. Dorsheimer was responsible for the Buffalo State Hospital commission (HABS NY-5606), and the New York State Capitol. In 1875 Olmsted--along with Richardson and Eidlitz--was a member of the Board of Architects for the Capitol, under the chairmanship of Lieutenant-Governor Dorsheimer. In 1876, Olmsted did the landscape design for the Buffalo State Hospital.

C. Sources of Information:

1. Old views: An undated photograph of the east facade from the southeast is located in the photographic collection, Buffalo and Erie County Historical Society.

2. Bibliography:

- a. Primary and unpublished sources:

- Scully, Vincent J., Jr. "The Cottage Style." Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 1949.

- b. Secondary and published sources:

- Buffalo and Erie County Historical Society. Minimum of four indexed entries of newspaper articles.

- Epstein, Ralph Cecil, and Clark, Florence M. Trends in Buffalo Real Estate Assessments, 1905-28. Buffalo: University of Buffalo, 1929.

- Hill, Henry Wayland. Municipality of Buffalo, New York; A History, 1720-1923. New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Co., Inc., 1923.

- Hitchcock, Henry-Russell. The Architecture of H. H. Richardson and His Times. Cambridge, Mass.: The M.I.T. Press, 1966.

- Olmsted, Frederick Law, Jr., and Kimball, T., eds. Frederick Law Olmsted, Landscape Architect.

Forty Years of Landscape Architecture. New York:
G. Putnam and Son, 1922.

Olmstead, Frederick Law, Sr. Preliminary Report
Respecting a Public Park in Buffalo. Buffalo,
1869.

Van Rensselaer, Marianna Griswold. Henry Hobson
Richardson and His Works. Park Forest, Ill.:
The Prairie School Press, 1967.

c. Likely sources not yet investigated:

Papers of Frederick Law Olmstead, Library of
Congress.

Records of Deeds, Buffalo City Clerk's Office.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The extremely formal treatment of the exterior brick and stone adds a measure of severity to an architectural form which was not uncommon in post-Civil War America.
2. Condition of fabric: The exterior of the house has been well maintained.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: The 2-1/2-story structure has an irregular, L-shaped plan with a large bay to the east.
2. Foundations: All foundations are dressed stone.
3. Wall construction: The exterior red pressed bricks laid in common bond are divided into geometric panels by stone borders on the east and south facades. Stone panels carved with a cross motif are set between the first- and second-floor windows. A stone border running below the cornice line frames the second-story windows. A similar carved motif is centered above those

windows on the south and east facades. The brickwork above this framing element and below the cornice is defined by diagonally laid projecting bricks.

4. Porches: The north entrance is located under a small, square porch with a flat, hipped roof. Paired, chamfered wooden columns support the roof. The bracketed eaves are similar to those of the conservatory. A short flight of steps leads to this porch.
5. Chimneys: There are four chimneys. Three red brick chimneys with inset panels of decorative brickwork in a cross motif have been lowered to the roof line. The cornices and clay-pot flues have been removed.
6. Openings:
 - a. Doorways: Aluminum and glass doors and frames have been installed in the east and north doorways.
 - b. Windows: On the east and south facades, the long, rectangular, double-hung windows are framed in stone. All windows have stone sills and lintels. A second-floor bay window located in the north facade contains two double-hung side windows which flank a flush boarded panel. Flat raised molding set in a large diamond pattern is applied to this panel. The asphalt shingled roof is topped by an iron gallery.
7. Roof: The mansard roof is covered by fish-scale slates. Originally the triangular gabled dormers with heavily molded cornices and stepped entablatures were finished by lateral scrolled brackets. The wooden cornice is finished by a row of small, simple, closely spaced brackets. Originally the mansard was topped by a finely worked iron gallery. The flattened hipped roof of the conservatory also had an iron gallery. The open eaves of this roof are finished by large, pierced wooden brackets.

C. Description of Interior:

The interior has been completely remodeled for commercial uses. One main, open-well stairway remains. This extends from the first-floor north entrance to the third floor. However, it appears that the whole stair was moved to the north to provide additional space in the rooms to the south.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The house is set back from the sidewalk. Delaware Avenue, at the turn of the century, was lined with large residences. Many of these houses have been similarly converted for office or apartment use. Others have been demolished.
2. Historic landscape design: According to an early, undated photograph in the Buffalo and Erie County Historical Society, the eastern edge of the property had a finely worked iron fence with cast-iron posts marking the north and south entrance gates.

Prepared by Susan R. Slade
September 1973

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

This photo-data book was prepared as part of a 1964-65 recording project in cooperation with the Buffalo-Western New York Chapter of AIA, Olaf William Shelgren (at that time Chairman of the Chapter's Preservation Committee), and Olaf William Shelgren, Jr.--both, of the firm Shelgren, Patterson and Marzec. Photographs were taken in May, 1965, by Jack E. Boucher, HABS staff photographer. Under the direction of John C. Poppeliers, Chief, HABS, a further research and editorial project was undertaken in September, 1973, by Susan R. Slade, architectural historian.